



Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
CDC 24/7: Saving Lives, Protecting People™

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)



What School Nutrition Professionals and Volunteers at Schools Need to Know about COVID-19

Updated Nov. 12, 2020

[Print](#)



[View Larger](#)

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a respiratory illness caused by a virus called SARS-CoV-2. Symptoms often include a cough or shortness of breath, or at least two of these: fever, chills, repeated shaking with chills, muscle pain, headache, sore throat, or new loss of taste and smell. Our understanding of how the virus spreads is evolving as we


learn more about it, so check the [CDC website](#) for the latest information. The virus is thought to spread mainly from person-to-person:

- Between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet).
- Through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks.

Recent studies indicate that the virus can be spread by people who are not showing symptoms. It may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes. This is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads, but we are still learning more about this virus. Older adults and people of any age who have serious underlying medical conditions may be at [higher risk for more serious complications](#) from COVID-19.

As a school nutrition professional, how can I protect myself and slow the spread?

For school nutrition professionals and volunteers working in meal preparation and/or distribution at a school/school district site or other public settings, potential sources of exposure include close contact with co-workers, students, and families with COVID-19 and touching your nose, mouth, or eyes after touching contaminated surfaces or handling items that others infected with COVID-19 have touched. Currently there is no evidence to support transmission of COVID-19 is spread through food.

- Notify your supervisor and stay home if having [symptoms](#).
- Follow [CDC-recommended steps](#) if you are sick. You should not return to work until the criteria to [discontinue home isolation](#) are met, in consultation with healthcare providers and [state](#) and [local](#)  health departments.
- Follow [CDC recommended precautions](#) and notify your supervisor if you are well but have a sick family member at home with COVID-19.
- Limit close contact with others and maintain a distance of at least 6 feet, when possible.
- CDC recommends [wearing cloth face coverings](#) in public settings where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain, especially in areas of significant community-based transmission. Cloth face coverings may prevent people who don't know they have the virus from transmitting it to others. These face coverings are not surgical masks or respirators and are not appropriate substitutes for them in workplaces where masks or respirators are recommended or required.
- [Clean](#), sanitize, and [disinfect](#) frequently touched surfaces such as kitchen countertops, cafeteria and service tables, door handles, carts, and trays, throughout the day. Follow the directions on the cleaning product's label and clean hands afterwards.
- Practice proper [hand hygiene](#). This is an important infection control measure. With appropriate hand hygiene, gloves are not necessary for workers who are not involved in food preparation. Wash your hands regularly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. An alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol can be used, but not as a substitute for cleaning hands with soap and water.

- Key times to wash hands include:
 - Before and after work shifts
 - Before and after work breaks
 - After using the restroom
 - Before eating or preparing food
 - Before putting on and after taking off disposable gloves when preparing food
 - After touching objects with bare hands which have been handled by other staff, customers or visitors, such as tables, trays, carts, racks, dishes, cups, utensils, bags, coolers, totes, and trash
 - After blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing
 - After putting on, touching, or removing cloth face coverings
- Avoid contact with body fluids.
- Do not touch your eyes, nose, or mouth.
- Use tissues when you cough, sneeze, or touch your face. Throw used tissues in the trash, and then wash your hands.

What steps should my employer take?

Employers should have a COVID-19 response plan to protect employees, following [CDC Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers](#). This plan should be shared with you and your coworkers. Employers should:

Reduce transmission among employees

- Take [steps to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 if an employee is sick](#).
 - Actively encourage sick employees to stay home.
 - Sick employees diagnosed with COVID-19 shouldn't return to work until [the criteria to discontinue home isolation are met](#), in consultation with healthcare providers and [state](#) and [local](#) [health departments](#).
- Provide employees with accurate information about COVID-19, [how it spreads](#), and risk of exposure.
- Be aware that some employees may be at [higher risk for severe illness](#), such as older adults and those with serious underlying medical conditions. Implement specific policies to minimize face-to-face contact between these employees or assign work tasks that allow them to maintain a distance of six feet from other workers, customers and visitors, or to telework if possible.
- Provide training to employees on proper [hand washing](#) practices and other routine [preventative measures](#). This will help prevent the spread of many diseases, including COVID-19.
- Provide employees with access to soap, clean running water, and materials for drying their hands, and provide alcohol-based hand sanitizers containing at least 60% alcohol at stations around the establishment for use by both workers and customers.

Maintain a healthy work environment



- Institute measures to physically separate and increase distance between employees, volunteers, other coworkers, students, and their families, such as:
 - Plan menus, production, and food preparation schedules to allow employees to maintain the recommended social distance of 6 feet while working when possible.
- Use tape to mark 6-foot workstations (boxes or stripes on the floor) in the kitchen, food service, and food delivery points where interactions with students or their families occur, if possible.
- Implement a plan for curbside pickup of meals or contactless [delivery service](#) (if possible) to minimize contacts with students and their families, when possible. When not possible, encourage employees to wear cloth face coverings.
- Place posters that encourage [staying home when sick](#), [cough and sneeze etiquette](#), and good [hand hygiene](#) in the school, at entrances, and where they are likely to be seen.
- Provide tissues and no-touch disposal receptacles for use by employees, volunteers and customers.
- Clean, sanitize, and disinfect frequently touched surfaces often. If the surfaces are visibly dirty, clean them prior to disinfecting. To disinfect, use products that meet [EPA's criteria for use against SARS-CoV-2](#) [↗](#), diluted household bleach solutions prepared according to the manufacturer's label for disinfection, or alcohol solutions with at least 70% alcohol, and are appropriate for the surface. Follow manufacturer's directions for use.
 - Conduct frequent cleaning of entrances, employee break rooms, rest areas, and other common areas, focusing on surfaces and objects that are touched by multiple people.
- Provide disposable disinfectant wipes, cleaners, or sprays that are effective against COVID-19 so employees can wipe down frequently touched surfaces such as food service work areas in kitchens, cafeterias, door handles, tables, and countertops, and in outside distribution areas.
- Follow all applicable local, state, and federal regulations and public health agency guidelines.

Maintain healthy business operations

- Designate a person who is responsible for responding to COVID-19 concerns. Employees should know who this person is and how to contact them.
- Implement flexible sick leave and supportive policies and practices. Consider drafting non-punitive emergency sick leave policies if sick leave is not offered to some or all employees. Employers should not require a positive COVID-19 test result or a healthcare provider's note for employees who are sick to validate their illness, qualify for sick leave, or to return to work.
- Provide information on who to contact if employees become sick. If an employee is confirmed to have COVID-19 infection, employers should inform fellow employees of their possible exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace but maintain confidentiality as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Where can I get more information?

Stay informed. Talk to your employer, supervisor, or the person responsible for responding to COVID-19 concerns. Utilize these sources for more information on reducing the risk of worker exposures to COVID-19:

- [CDC Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers to Plan and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) website](#)
- [CDC Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility website](#)
- [CDC COVID-19 General Business Frequently Asked Questions website](#)
- [CDC Food and Grocery Pick-up and Delivery website](#)
- [CDC Grocery and Food Retail Workers website](#)
- [NIOSH Workplace Safety and Health Topic website](#)
- [CDC COVID-19 website](#)
- [CDC COVID-19 Community/Schools website](#)
- [OSHA COVID-19 website](#) 
- [FDA Food Safety and COVID-19 website](#) 
- CDCINFO: 1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636) | TTY: 1-888-232-6348 | [website](#)

Last Updated Nov. 12, 2020

Content source: [National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases \(NCIRD\), Division of Viral Diseases](#)